

OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO: SE-14-THE  
CAPABILITY OF THE USSR TO LAUNCH A MILITARY ATTACK ON THE  
CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES PRIOR TO MID-1952.

1. The current composition of the Soviet Navy represents an accommodation between the USSR's ultimate objective of world domination and certain geographical handicaps which influence and limit the Soviets in their naval strategic concept.
  2. The operating forces of the Soviet Navy are divided into four major fleets and four flotillas, all maintained in a high state of readiness. The Soviet Navy is strong in submarines, mine warfare and Arctic operations. It is weak by reason of wide geographical separation of its maritime frontiers, limited operational experience, and lack of aircraft carriers.
  3. The philosophy of Russian naval warfare, while based on the aggressive objectives of World Communism, is tempered by security considerations, geographical handicaps, and lack of extensive maritime experience and tradition. Red naval philosophy may perhaps be described as an attempt to apply to sea warfare the principles of mass and numerical strength which the Soviet Union has so successfully demonstrated in land warfare.
  4. An estimate of the principal courses of action open to the Soviet Navy indicates that it has the capability of seriously interfering with enemy sea communications and impeding enemy naval and amphibious operations in the vicinity of Soviet-controlled waters.
  5. The mission of the Soviet Navy is believed to include defense of the maritime frontiers and coastal lines of communications of the USSR; protection and support of Soviet ground forces on its seaward flanks; the defeat of hostile naval forces operating in Soviet coastal waters; and the weakening or defeat of opposing maritime power by offensive action against lines of
- ONI review(s) completed.

communication and naval forces, in order to support other components of USSR armed strength in carrying out Soviet policy.

6. During the period under consideration, the capability of the Soviet surface fleet and merchant marine for participating in an attack on the continental U.S. is considered to be very limited.

7. The Soviet Navy will be unable to organize major combatant task or striking forces (as they are known in the U.S. and British navies), built around aircraft carriers, during the period under consideration. Until such forces become available, Soviet surface forces will be largely limited to operations in waters covered by shore-based air cover and support. Aside from raiding or other diversionary actions by individual units or small forces, the principal arm capable of carrying an effective offensive effort well beyond the limits of Soviet-controlled coastal zones is the Soviet submarine force. The core of present-day Soviet naval surface strength is centered in small craft, whose numerical strength and characteristics represent a powerful potential for mine warfare in restricted waters, short-haul amphibious lift and support, and defensive action against raids and amphibious assault. This force however, is entirely unsuited for a trans-oceanic attack. It is however stiffened by the small, but rapidly growing force of cruisers, large destroyers and ocean-going escorts. As a "force-in-being", the latter would necessitate the commitment of large ships to operations against the USSR's maritime frontiers, and would subject a hostile force to attrition by mine, torpedo and shore-based air warfare.

8. The Soviet Navy has only infrequently engaged in combat maneuvers on a large scale. Although training efforts are kept at a high level, the infrequency of maneuvers and the limited number of combat vessels available combine to make it doubtful that they could efficiently engage in extended

large scale combat operations.

9. The USSR presently lacks the advance base facilities or mobile logistic support requisite for an attack on the U.S. Any attempt to establish advanced bases in the immediate future could not be accomplished undetected.

10. As noted above, the Soviet force of minor combatant vessels, including amphibious types, is entirely unsuited for a transoceanic attack. Any substitute for amphibious lift would require calling upon the Soviet Merchant Marine. However, the present character of the Soviet Merchant Marine, a heterogeneous collection of vessels, many obsolescent, and critically lacking in tankers, largely precludes the possibility of its employment in any large scale transoceanic attack. The foregoing applies to attacks on the U.S., Canada and Panama.

11. For attacks upon Alaska, it is estimated that the Soviets could transport approximately 6,000 troops in an amphibious assault coupled with an airborne attack. Such assault would probably be directed at (1) the Seward Peninsula, because it partially controls the sea lanes to Northern Alaska and Asia, dominates the northern half of Alaska, and would be more easy to isolate and hold than other areas; (2) the Anchorage-Fairbanks area, because it is important logistically, has the main inland routes of communication, and dominates southern Alaska; (3) the Aleutian Chain, since they may be regarded as a series of stepping stones between North America and Asia; and (4) Kodiak Island, because it would serve with the Aleutians as a point of entry to southern Alaska.

12. It is believed that any attack upon the U.S. by the USSR would undoubtedly involve attacks upon Alaska in order to neutralize U.S. bases or to capture them in order to utilize them for further attacks upon the U.S., as well as a hope of creating psychological disturbances amongst the U.S.

populace. However, in view of the extremely limited capability of the Soviets to maintain control of the sea during the period of this estimate, it is doubtful that the Soviets assess that they have in fact a real capability for maintaining a foothold in Alaska even if they were successful in establishing beachheads.

13. In summary, it may be said of Soviet surface capabilities for attacks upon the U.S. that they will remain extremely limited during the period of this estimate. Soviet surface units will not present a serious threat or challenge to Western Naval power and their employment in any attack upon the U.S. would probably be limited to raids upon US/Allied shipping or other diversionary operations.

14. The major naval threat to the U.S. during this period is in Soviet Submarine capabilities. The USSR will have during the period a total of 370 submarines, of which 104 will be capable of launching a direct attack against the United States. Assuming present disposition remains unchanged nineteen ocean patrol submarines will be available to the Soviet Pacific fleet for attacks upon the west coast of the United States, and four high submerged speed and 81 ocean patrol submarines will be available from the Baltic, Northern and Black Sea fleets for an attack on the east coast. It must be noted that the Soviets would at all times be able to employ greater numbers of submarines in offensive mining and or torpedo attacks than were the Germans and Japanese during World War II. The probable courses of action of Soviet submarines to be encountered are:

(a) Attacks on merchant shipping and naval vessels. By using all of the submarines available for operations adjacent to the U.S. exclusively for offensive torpedo operations, a maximum of approximately 1700 torpedoes could be transported initially.

(b) Offensive minelaying along shipping routes and in the approaches to principal harbors. These mines could be sown covertly and the first indication of their presence would not occur until one was struck by a ship. By utilization of all the submarines available for operations in waters adjacent to the U.S. exclusively for mining operations it is estimated that a maximum of 2500 mines could be laid initially.

(c) Landing of saboteurs and agents. It is estimated that approximately 2100 of such could be moved in one lift utilizing all of the submarines capable of reaching U.S. shores.

(d) Undetected reconnaissance and radar picket duty.

(e) Serving as guides for long-range bombers and relay stations for guided missiles.

(f) Launching of guided missiles and rockets with conventional or atomic warheads, against coastal targets. Although there is no evidence that the Soviets have in fact developed and applied such techniques to submarines the possibility of such cannot be discounted.

15. It is difficult to predict with any degree of certainty the effectiveness of Soviet submarines in a war with the U.S. The Soviets have never carried out, in wartime, operations of the type they will need to conduct in order to realize the potential value of their numerically strong submarine fleet. Moreover, the amount of damage to US/Allied interests which would be expected would be dependant not only on the capabilities of the Soviets and the amount of US/Allied shipping but also on the effectiveness of US/Allied counter-measures, such as attacks by US/Allied forces on USSR submarine bases, offensive and defensive action taken against submarines in the form of joint carrier-destroyer operations and minesweeping and convoy escort operations.